

MAINE IRISH

HERITAGE CENTER

2017 - WHAT A YEAR!

Éirinn go Brách: Ireland forever.

Éirinn go Brách- growing up in the West End in the 1950's and 60's, you saw many buttons with the Anglicized version of this phrase, "Erin go Bragh". The Maine Irish Heritage Center (MIHC) continues to strive be the center for all things Irish. The year 2017 was full of joyful activities and community events.

February we began hosting Saint Joseph's student interns for most of the year, which worked tirelessly on the Brennan Archives and spent a considerable amount of time working on our collections and data base. Our dear friend and past Claddagh award recipient Professor Michael Connolly screened the documentary film "Building Bridges" about the relationship between Senator George Mitchell and Governor Joseph Brennan. This was for our fourth annual Karen Lemke lecture. February also saw the installation of our new LED lighting in our entire lower level. We received a considerable amount of sweat equity from the apprentices and journeymen of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers #567, during the installation.

March was again our busiest month. The neighborhood march to Harbor View Park to raise the Irish Tricolor was led by the late Gerry Conley, Sr. 2017's Saint Patrick's Day Parade saw an increase in both marchers and viewers along the path. We partnered with our friends from the Victoria Mansion for a Victorian sampling. Author Lisa Cary gave a lecture on her book "The Stolen Child" which was accompanied by a documentary about the abandonment of islands off the west coast of Ireland.

April begins our busy rental season. Several community non-profits use our space for volunteer appreciation and award dinners. On Sunday April 2nd the Fiddle Ensemble performed a benefit concert for the MIHC in exchange for using our space for rehearsals. Sixty five musicians performed that afternoon and an audience of over 200 in the sanctuary. Irish sculptor Betty Newman Maguire presented her mixed media installation "The Forgotten Heroines of the Easter Uprising" an event that was co-sponsored by the University of Southern Maine. April ended with another new community group Welcoming the Stranger, utilizing our space; they are a grassroots project matching mentors with asylum-seekers to help them integrate into the Greater Portland community.

May Our executive director headed to The Second Global Civic Forum that took place at Dublin Castle in Dublin, Ireland. The theme of the conference, which was attended by 220 individuals representing 150 organizations from around the world, was 'Communities, Connections, and Conversations'. We are so thankful to our friend Christy Comeau-Pierce who donated a beautiful baby grand piano to the Center. Christy will be doing a fundraiser on Sunday April 8th. We became Community Partners with Bare Portland, a performance collaborative that utilized our space for rehearsals for one of their community performances.

The summer months at the MIHC continued to see our partners the Irish American Club and the Claddagh Mhor Band utilize our space regularly. The Maine Gaeltacht DNA project continued to have regular hours on Friday and their data base now includes over 1000 participants. AA meetings and other smaller community groups including Standing Up For Racial Justice were also active in the summer months. This year our weddings and receptions were down but more and more former parishioners and others are using our space for memorial services and landmark birthdays or significant anniversaries.

September was ushered in by annual Labor Day Breakfast, held at the Center since 2003. September also saw our first annual MIHC Golf Tournament held at Riverside Golf Course. It was a huge success in every way and we are hoping to make this an annual fundraiser for the Center.

October saw our friends from Window Dressers spend 10 days at the Center in collaboration with the West End Neighborhood Association. It attracted over 100 volunteer to produce over 500 window inserts that included the construction of several to insulate our oversized windows in our lower level function room.

CULTURE THAT ENDURES



This November saw two of our prestige events the Claddagh dinner celebration and our Celtic Fair. Folks filled the house for the 2017 Claddagh Award winner Senator Susan Collins. The program included a video shout out from Vice President Joseph Biden and was warmly received by family and friends. Each year our Celtic Fair continues to outshine the prior, and this year was no exception. Mark your calendar for 2018 Celtic Fair on November 10th.

The Gaeltacht Project now has over 1000 individuals participating in this groundbreaking DNA program. Every Friday volunteer genealogists along with our resident historian Matt Barker are solving mysteries and gaining fans and members for our center. Of particular note Maureen Coyne Norris was feted at the Golden Bridges Convention in Boston, hosted by the Irish Echo newspaper. She received the award for her long time commitment to all things Irish.

We certainly had a very eventful 2017, but it was not without some losses. The Sunday morning AA meeting that has been a bedrock renter, moved to a more central location, and Baxter Academy who have used our facility for years, moved into a

new facility in the east end of Portland. We had 6 weddings and no receptions in 2017; this number was down from last year also. We will have to make up for that revenue loss. We hope to institute an annual raffle and have recently entered into an affinity program with our local TD bank. Stay tuned for more details.

Once again none of this can happen without the support of our members. Similar to last year we are making an extra effort to sign up business and organizations. If you know of any businesses or organizations that might be interested, please let us know. Membership levels have not changed and you can find a copy of what our membership includes at our website - www.maineirish.com. Please if you haven't already like us on Facebook.

Let us close by saying how important each of our supporters is to the success of the MIHC, and we again thank you for your time, talent and treasure.

P.Vincent O'Malley
Executive Director

CULTURE THAT ENDURES